

# Villa Creek is the cowboy chic winery of Paso Robles

By Matt Kettmann in *The San Francisco Chronicle*

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Cris and JoAnn Cherry moved to Paso Robles in 1996 to start a restaurant called Villa Creek on the city's central square. Five years later, inspired by the wines their neighbors were making, they started to produce their own wines for the restaurant.

In 2003, they purchased a 60-acre property in the hills of Peachy Canyon and built their winery, making about 3,000 cases a year from such iconic properties as the James Berry Vineyard. Beginning in 2012, the Cherrys started planting Rhone varieties on their property, called the Maha Estate, as well. They finally shut down the restaurant in 2017 to focus full-time on growing grapes and making wine.

The tasting room, which is open to the public Friday to Sunday and by appointment the rest of the week, is connected to the winery and surrounded by Maha's vines. Expect large white dogs to greet you at the gate and escort you to the patio, which is lined with tall bunch grass and a manzanita shrub. With a large skull on the exterior wall, and often with Cris Cherry sporting a wrinkled, wide-brimmed hat as he entertains visitors, the vibe is modern cowboy chic.

Inside, a record player awaits your vinyl selection, which ranges from Bob Marley to the Police to Art Blakey, and there's the requisite jackalope hanging from the wooden walls. Through a window you can see dozens of library wines as well as a hock of jamon hanging from the ceiling.

The tasting flight features four regular wines — typically one white, such as the Roussanne or Fiano, and three reds. It could be the Syrah-led blends Avenger and High Road, or the single-vineyard Syrah from Bassetti Vineyard near Cambria, or Cabernet Sauvignon from the relatively old vines of Carver Vineyard.

**WHAT TO TRY:** The Willow Creek Cuvee, a Grenache, Syrah and Mourvedre blend, offers a first glimpse of the Cherrys' Maha Estate, as it blends that estate fruit with the G2 and James Berry vineyards. The High Road is a study of James Berry Vineyard, showing how Paso can balance ripeness with finesse.